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U.S. and Soviet Views Far Apart At Opening of Arms Talks Today

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WASHINGTON, June 28—The Soviet Union and the United States will begin strategic arms reduction talks in Geneva on Tuesday with positions that are far apart despite ritualistic expressions of "cautious optimism" and publicly shared hopes for "substantial reductions."

President Reagan is seeking deep cuts as a first step, particularly in what he believes to be superior Soviet forces. The Kremlin says it wants to build on the 1979 strategic arms limitation treaty that was signed by Moscow and Washington but never approved by the Senate, to pursue a freeze on further deployments and to agree on deep cuts later.

The two sides stand on the threshold of deploying even more devastating strategic nuclear arms — ballistic missiles with pinpoint accuracy and cruise missiles so small and numerous as perhaps to defy future control. American intelligence sources are now saying that Moscow is making a crash effort to develop sea-launched cruise missiles to match the thousands of these new missiles called for in Reagan Administration programs.

Instructions Go to Geneva

According to Administration officials, the gap between the two sides would have been wider still had not President Reagan in the last weeks resisted efforts by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger to harden the initial American position. Specifically, the officials said that at a National Security Council meeting last Friday Mr. Reagan rejected a Pentagon proposal that the United States call for elimination of all the large Soviet SS-18 land-based missiles.

Today, a detailed set of instructions was cabled to the American delegation in Geneva describing the original Presidential negotiating position, the amendments made to it in another decision memorandum issued about three weeks ago and interpretations of these decisions by experts in the departments and agencies.

The President's proposal calls for a two-phase approach. In phase one, there would be a common ceiling of 850 ballistic missiles, down from 2,350 for the Soviet Union and 1,700 for the United States. The 850 missiles on each side would be allowed to carry no more than 5,000 nuclear warheads, down one-third for each side from current levels of about 7,500. Of the 5,000 missile warheads, no more than 2,500 would be allowed on land-based missiles.

Long-range bombers would be limited at their current levels of 400 for the United States and 350 for the Soviet Union under the plan, but no reductions would be agreed on until the second phase. Cruise missiles could be discussed in phase one but not limited in any way until phase two.

The Soviet Union would also be required to make proportional reductions in their SS-18's, a point added in the recent Presidential decision memorandum in response to a Pentagon recommendation.

In the second phase, Mr. Reagan proposes equality of ballistic missile throw weight, or payload. The first-phase cuts would bring payload totals toward equality but not eliminate the Soviet lead, which is now nearly three to one. Bomb payload, where the United States has the lead, would not be counted.

In another potentially significant part of the recent decision memorandum, Mr. Reagan held that phase one and phase two constituted "a single negotiation." That left open to future decision whether Moscow would have to agree at least in principle to equality of missile throw weight even before a phase-one agreement could be concluded. If so, this would further complicate prospects for any agreement.

As matters stand, the two sides are approaching the talks from profoundly different assessments of what constitutes a fair trade and the current strategic nuclear balance.

The Reagan Administration believes that Moscow has "a definite margin of superiority," largely because Soviet land-based missiles are better able than American land-based missiles to destroy targets hardened by steel and concrete, such as missile silos and command centers. Mr. Reagan's negotiating goal is to bring about deep cuts in the SS-18 and SS-19 land-based missiles, which he believes give Moscow a first-strike potential.

The Soviet Position

The Soviet Union maintains that overall parity exists between the two sides. While Soviet diplomats acknowledge that they have the advantage in land-based forces, they see the United States retaining advantages in submarines that launch ballistic missiles, the missiles they launch, long-range bombers and cruise missiles. This judgment is shared by some American experts as well. Soviet officials contend that the American proposal requires concessions in the one area of Soviet advantage without corresponding concessions in areas of American advantage. Thus, they are likely to call for limitations on new American systems such as the MX land-based missile, the Trident II submarine-launched missile, the B-1 bomber and cruise missiles.

In the Soviet view, these new systems would give the United States a first-strike potential and have to be stopped. It is this Soviet concern that Reagan Administration officials believe gives the United States some bargaining leverage. Administration officials have been saying in the last two weeks that Mr. Reagan is prepared to limit, but not ban, deployment of the new weapons in return for Moscow's agreement to his proposal.

Administration officials maintain that what will result from all of this is not mutual invulnerability but what they call "equality of vulnerability."

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